



GYPSY MOTH AERIAL SPRAYING TO BEGIN MAY 11

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(Television Editors: B-roll video is available, please call.)

MADISON—Yellow spray planes will soon take to the sky to battle gypsy moth in southwest Wisconsin as part of the effort by the Wisconsin Cooperative Gypsy Moth program to slow the spread of this destructive forest pest.

“May 11, weather permitting, is the target to begin the 2005 spray season,” said Chris Lettau, gypsy moth program coordinator for the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Low-flying airplanes will give an early morning wake-up call to residents living in and around sites in Green, Grant, and Iowa Counties. The spraying is necessary to control the spread of gypsy moth, a destructive pest that feeds on the leaves of oaks, maples and many other types of trees and shrubs. Spraying begins about 5 a.m. and will continue until that day’s spray plan is complete and as weather conditions allow. The planes fly about 50 feet above the trees, so they may be loud.

The plan is to treat the following areas on Wednesday, May 11:

Green County - 4 sites: including villages of Monticello and Albany; towns of Exeter, Mount Pleasant, Monroe and Albany.

Grant County - 1 site: towns of Hickory Grove, Castle Rock, Watterstown and Muscoda.

Iowa County - 1 site: the town of Ridgeway.

County maps are available on the program’s web site at <http://www.datcp.state.wi.us>. Enter gypsy moth in the search box or find the link to gypsy moth treatment sites under the popular topic heading on the main page. People can also call the toll-free gypsy moth hotline at 1-800-642-MOTH (1-800-642-6684) for more information.

The planes will spray a biological pesticide called *Bacillus thuringiensis* sub. sp. *kurstaki* or Btk. Btk comes from a naturally occurring soil bacteria and is made in a fermentation process, similar to brewing beer. The bacteria forms a protein that when eaten by the gypsy moth caterpillar, creates a toxin in the caterpillar’s gut. This causes the caterpillar to stop eating and it will die within a few hours to a few days.

“Btk is not harmful to people, wildlife or pets,” Lettau said. “If someone is concerned about the spray application, they may wish to stay indoors or leave the area until the spraying is done. Pets or livestock may be frightened by the low-flying planes so you may want to keep them inside if possible.”

A second application of Btk treatment will follow about 5 to 10 days after the first application. Areas in 10 other western Wisconsin counties will be sprayed with two applications of Btk beginning in the latter half of May.

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GYPSY MOTH—add one

In June, certain areas in Bayfield, Clark, Jackson and Monroe Counties will receive one application of a product called *Gypchek* that contains a virus specific to gypsy moth. Gypchek is used in areas where the caterpillar-stage of endangered moths or butterflies may be feeding at the same time as the gypsy moth caterpillars. Gypchek will not harm the endangered or threatened moths or butterflies.

“We’re at the mercy of the weather so our plans can change at the last minute. We will notify local media before we spray an area, and we’ll also have an updated message on our toll-free gypsy moth hotline,” Lettau said.

“The planes begin flying at daybreak to take advantage of low winds and high humidity,” Lettau said. “We realize that many people are sleeping but it is the best time of day to do this type of work. In urban areas, we will shut down between 7:15 and 8:30 a.m.”

Postcards have been mailed to people living in and around spray sites to alert them of the upcoming event. Local media and local law enforcement will also be notified the day before the planes are scheduled to fly.

The gypsy moth severely impacts the health of trees and shrubs and the insects may also impact human health. The insect was introduced in Massachusetts in 1869 and has since spread south and west. The leading edge of the advancing population has reached central Wisconsin.

“Gypsy moth caterpillars defoliate millions of acres of trees each year in the United States. The tree leaves do grow back but the trees are weakened and may be killed by other pests or diseases,” Lettau said. “People may have an allergic reaction or skin irritation to the shed skins of the caterpillars and their droppings.”

Terrorist threats and world events have also had an impact on the program.

“We’re aware of the public’s increased concern for safety. Security and safety are of prime importance. We will continue with extra security measures to maintain the integrity of the program,” Lettau emphasized. Each spray block will have at least one ground observer who will be in radio contact with a DNR spotter plane that flies above the spray plane.

The gypsy moth program will target another life stage of the forest pest by spraying nearly 154,920 acres in 13 counties with a product that will disrupt the mating cycle of male gypsy moths.

“The mating disrupter or pheromone (FAIR-UH-MONE) flake will be sprayed from airplanes from late June through July,” Lettau said. More information on the pheromone flakes will sent out in June.

For more information, call the hotline at 1-800-642-MOTH (1-800-642-6684). Once spraying begins, the hotline will carry a daily message with updates on the spray plans.

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